

Bible Studies for Life: April 18

The Return of Jesus • Matthew 24:3-8, 29-32, 42-44

By Don Schuman



Schuman

Highway signs can tell us where we are and where we're headed. Likewise, the signs that Jesus gives us in the Olivet discourse tell us where we are and where we are headed according to God's plan for Christ's return. Let us follow the signs.

The Signs of the Beginning of Sorrows (24:3-8). The disciples asked Jesus two distinct questions about two different times: When will the Temple be destroyed, and what will be the signs of His return and the end of the age? Part of taking "heed that no man deceive you" includes discerning which question is being answered where in this discourse.

Believers today have that same desire to know the signs of the end of this age, which now include the coming of Christ. Millions of books on this subject have been sold and continue to sell that offer an extensive range of end times interpretations.

The return of Christ is probably the most anticipated event in history. This writer is certainly praying, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Deceptions that are antichrist (against Christ) in our time include the theory of Godless evolution, Marxism, sinful lifestyles considered normal, and all other worldviews created by the ungodly who are opposed to Jesus Christ. Jesus warned of many antichrists before *the* Antichrist and the spirit of antichrist is prevalent in our postmodern culture.

Other signs of the beginning of sorrows, or the end of the age, include news of wars and rumors of wars when nation will fight against nation. In addition to manmade disasters of war, the beginning of sorrows will include famine, earthquakes, and pestilence.

The Sign of the Beginning of Summer (24:29-32). Rather than try to predict the day and the hour of His coming (which so many “prophets” have failed to do), Jesus tells us to look at the season of the signs. The parable of the fig tree’s ripening for summer symbolizes the return of Christ. All the signs of His return will be evident to the faithful.

The branches of the fig tree are tender, and its leaves are sprouting everywhere. Believers who are watching will find hope amid hopelessness, redemption amid disaster, and a new day in the deepest darkness.

Christ’s return will be sudden, glorious, and unexpected. Unbelievers will be filled with terror while believers will be filled with joy. We do not know the hour, but we know from Jesus and the rest of the Word of God that the time is ripe for His harvest. The Apostle John, in Revelation 16:15, tells us that now is the time to believe and be ready.

This does not mean that we are to sell everything and go live in a cave, as some foolish people have done. It means we must be watchful and ready at any time. As we go about our daily lives we should live with calm assurance, heightened expectation, and deep longing for His return.

The Sign for Being Prepared (24:42-44). Jesus compares the

unexpectedness of His return to the unexpectedness of a thief. Just as the man of the house would be prepared if he knew the thief was coming that night, so the believer should be prepared for Christ's return.

The faithful watchman prepares inwardly for the Lord's return by faith, prayer, and Bible study, and outwardly by service within and outside the church. Such service should include telling others to prepare for His return and helping them to be ready.

The Lord Jesus gives us these signs not to cause fear, but to raise hope. He said, "See that ye be not troubled" (v. 6). These disasters do not prove that things have gotten beyond God's control nor that He doesn't care. He has told of these things because He does care and one day He will exercise His total control.

These disasters show us the time for His return is drawing near, but Christ has not left us comfortless. We have His Word of promise. As previous lessons from this unit have borne out, we have the Comforter, the Holy Spirit inside us. We know where the resurrected Christ is: physically at the right hand of the Majesty on high and spiritually wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, as He said. May we be found faithful at His return.

Schuman is pastor of Temple Church, Myrtle.